

Tips for Maintaining Sanity

Everything the students do does not have to be graded. Small reflection exercises can keep the students engaged, but they do not need to be assessed.

Do as much as you can before the class starts. Plan out the paper topics, write the exams—do it all from starting with the learning goals in mind.

Look at all the due dates for all your classes together—my first year teaching here I had 3 classes of 30-40 in the spring, and six I.S. students. I wrote syllabi with 2 exams and a final each, and one term paper. I had an exam in each class the week before Spring Break, and the term paper due two weeks after Spring break.

For the larger intro class, I create several small paper (1-2 pgs) prompts for the first third of the course, several prompts for the second third, and several prompts for the final third. Each paper prompt has a different due date and I assign (or let students sign up for) no more than 9 students to each prompt. This way I get small stacks of papers throughout the semester – breaking up the grading – and get only 9 or so on any given topic (so I don't have to read a billion papers on X...which gets boring).

Michelle

1. Mark changes as you go for the next time around. I put post-it tabs on my binder for each class with notes if something did not work well or I had an idea to change something in the future — so I don't forget. (I tab the syllabus with key changes for the next iteration and section of my notes). The same goes for the master schedule for the class. I highlight the current schedule with ideas of adding/removing time on given topics for the next time around.
2. I generally try to not change too much in a given iteration. I like to try one new things in a given unit and not completely revamp everything. For example in FYS, if a book/ reading went well I keep it and then swap out 1-2 that weren't as good. My classes are more evolutionary than revolutionary.
3. I am now using my teaching reflections to focus on a few key action items for the next iteration (or even other classes). These are a few points of focus for what to do moving forward and help me think more effectively on where to focus planning efforts.

Sarah

My only contribution may be old news now: I do as much online as possible, posting every assignment on our course webpages (no student can lose them any more!) and collecting only electronic versions of papers and essays in Dropbox folders. I find it much easier and more productive to edit electronically because I can comment more effectively, embed links, and move blocks of text.

Again, this may be the rule now more than the exception. If you want to see a recent course

website, here's one: <http://sedstrat.voices.wooster.edu/>

Mark

I like to assign meaty, substantial papers to students, but hate when I get hit with 25 or 30 papers at a time to grade. Lately, I have tried assigning "rolling" papers, where a few students will be responsible for writing about a particular topic related to what we will be discussing in class. That gives the class a few "experts" on that topic that I can then call on to add knowledge to our discussion. It also means that I get two or three papers a class session over the course of a semester rather than 30 at once.

For example, in my Large-Scale Political Violence class [<http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/psci247/>], each student is responsible for a "Data Paper" [<http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/files/2012/12/PAPER1-247.pdf>] and a "Case Study Paper" [<http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/files/2012/12/Paper2-1.pdf>]. Students identify which paper topics they wish to write about (one data paper and one case paper per student) The student(s) writing about data are examining how social scientists conceptualize and operationalize the type of violence that we are discussing that class. I then call on them to help us when we begin to discuss different ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing that type of violence. They are our in-class experts who add to our ongoing conversation. Later, as we discuss causes and dynamics of a particular type of political violence, we use the cases we have all read about to help to understand those issues better, but also rely on the expertise of the student(s) writing about a case that we have not all read about for that day (ex: we read about Rwanda and Bosnia, but a student writing about the genocide in Cambodia can serve as an in-house expert who informs us about how that case does or does not confirm our understanding of the phenomenon given what we have already read about).

In my Intro IR class [<http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/psci120/>] I do the same thing but with different types of short paper assignments. Over the course of the semester we touch on a number of relationships or phenomenon, as well as a number of policy challenges. Students choose one Background Knowledge paper (short 3 source lit review - <http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/files/2012/12/paper1-1.pdf>), and one Policy Paper (<http://discover.wooster.edu/mkrain/files/2012/12/paper2-1.pdf>) per semester, and then become our in-class experts on those issues. For example, I might have two students who chose to write their lit review papers on whether economic sanctions are effective. When we get to the topic of economic statecraft, I can call on them to help add to our class discussion. Two other students might have written about whether the US should impose sanctions on North Korea over their nuclear weapons proliferation activities. They can then help us understand the policy issues and alternatives involved. The background knowledge paper helps them (and class) see that knowledge from class is not based on opinion or "gut instinct" but rigorous research, and the policy paper helps them to critically analyze a problem, identify alternatives, and advocate for their preferred option.

These short rolling paper assignments allow me to assign meatier papers over the course of the

semester without being swamped by grading. It allows me time to grade one or two papers on each topic with more care (and with no looming deadlines and stacks of ungraded paper). It certainly makes my life easier and the course easier to manage, even though I am assigning the same number of papers. It allows me to demonstrate how basic student research can help them develop new insights that they can share with others about a topic (develop expertise), and provides a safe platform for shier students to participate from (that is, they are called on to contribute to class, but they know it will happen ahead of time and they are prepared with information they have already thought about and have written about, and are the "experts" on). As such, it also benefits the students and our in-class discussion greatly!

I hope that helps.

Matt

One tip: When developing your assignments, think about the fact you all be grading them and how much time that will take. It underappreciated by faculty how important it is to get the assignments back to student promptly. Faculty should also remember that you will be probably teaching at least two classes in that semester so think about when assignments from both classes will be due.

Its important to get the assignments back in a timely manner so develop them with an eye towards how fast can you get them back. In other words, I don't like to assign another assignment until I have provided feedback from the previous assignment. This helps me prioritize my assignment and not do so many.

For reading and discussion - I am still learning this but one thing I have tried to do recently is consider that whatever I assign is multiplied by four (student typically take four classes). This helps me be realistic about what they can do between classes.

Dean

One: Require revisions even on very short writing assignments. You can have the students conduct peer reviews of the first drafts, thus drastically cutting down on your own grading time on those. And the final products are invariably of a much higher quality.

Two: Google Forms is an invaluable tool for having students enter independently-gathered data. It takes a little time to learn it if you don't already know it (but not much); and it takes a little time to set up a template form for students to enter data into (but not much). But then you can release the students to collect certain data and enter it, and you can then share the resulting spreadsheet with them and have them conduct some kinds of analysis on the data, or just spur a classroom discussion with it. Example: I have students in a Food Systems class go to the grocery store and write down the names of all the ingredients on a certain set of products. Then they enter the information into a Google Form that I have set up. Once everyone has entered their data, it's all in one place and we can easily calculate, for example, how many canned goods have corn syrup in them, or how many contain GMO ingredients, etc. I find this a useful time-management trick because the data become so easily centralized and thus can serve as the base

for follow-up exercises in class, without putting the onus for data centralization and analysis on me.

Matt

Here are my "words of wisdom" on the topic below.

- 1) Especially when teaching a new course, solve homework and exams before assigning them.
- 2) For each assignment, be very clear about expectations and grading. Miscommunication and misunderstanding leads to a frustrated class.

Sofia

I read (somewhere and sometime this academic year) that it's possible to "enjoy" or find a degree of pleasure even in tasks we don't like and don't enjoy. I would not disagree with your epiphany (I don't correct all the pop quizzes I give). I do know that the last two times I faced a pile of exams I tried to look at the task as having some pleasing moments, at the least. And at the very least this helped me start correcting and after I started correcting the second time, I found a way to make progress: not correct each exam separately, but correct page 1 of all exams, then to page 2, etc. After a few exams--proceeding page by page-- I had memorized answers (e.g., multiple choice answers) and it just felt like I was working more efficiently. Maybe I wasn't, but I corrected all the exams in one afternoon and that almost never happens.

Mary

Similar to you, I've learned in teaching large introductory chemistry courses that in-class quizzes are difficult to manage – both in implementing efficiently and then in getting feedback to the students (I would spend hours every week grading the quizzes). Students appreciate the feedback, but it was not a high impact use of my time or in-class time.

I have learned that I can distribute a quiz in class and tell students to do it on their own time, and to take within 15 minutes. I also post the key and tell them to review their answers with the key, and to come see me if they are stuck.

Although this assignment is not added to their grades, it gives them the feedback that they need, they can learn from their mistakes (without penalty) and it saves me a TON of out-of-class time, which I can dedicate to preparing for a better class session (that is now now longer disrupted by weekly quizzes).

That's my quick thought.

Mark

Tips from Workshop Discussion

Grading

- Only grade some problems
- Provide a model of the right answer, and have students grade it themselves
- Use a check/minus/plus system (some discussion on how to convert that to numerical system)
- Timed paper grading (you can only spend xx minutes on each paper)
- Assign shorter papers, and focus with each paper on only one aspect. Grade only that aspect (e.g. structure)
- Provide a summary of best answers on a test when you return it so that you don't have to right comments on each
- For I.S.: Have students read out loud to you what they have written
- Self grading with a key, then you only grade some at random
- Use Qualtrics or Google forms to gather discussion questions, reflections. Then you can display in one sheet for class
- Choose one student each assignment to help you grade
- Make reflection and evaluation the students' job
- Use "compare versions" in Word to see if I.S. drafts have changed

Course Preparation

- Cut down on the number of readings—do a "deep dive" on a small # of readings
- DO LESS!!
- Leave class periods blank to provide some flex in the schedule and time for group work
- Do fewer changes from semester to semester (e.g. a 10% rule—change no more than 10% in each iteration)
- Make students do more—gather data, research a topic
- Have students create their own rubric
- Have students write the discussion questions

Office Hours/I.S. Advising

- Only meet by appointment
- Use an online sign-up system like youcanbook.me or doodle
- Require students to bring an agenda for I.S. Meetings
- Fill small gaps with appointments—e.g. schedule I.S. students for ½ hour, then more if they need it. Combine with one group meeting per week
- Have each student provide a summary of the weeks' discussion, or have them send you an email after each meeting saying, "this is what we talked about and this is what I'm going to do."
- Schedule an I.S. bootcamp, where they are working, but you are available for meetings